

GREENWorks

Ideas for a Cleaner Environment

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Button Up, New Hampshire

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Another New England winter is upon us. But the cold weather doesn't mean you have to watch your next paycheck go up the chimney in smoke. Just ask the Quinn family of East Montpelier, Vermont. Last year with the help of Button Up they made home weatherization improvements to their 200-year-old farmhouse, which saved the family 340 gallons of oil, roughly \$900, in the first year. In the spirit of energy savings, here are five cold weather tips to help keep you warm this winter.

1) Take Back the Thermostat

The smaller the difference between inside and outside, the less heat you lose. Keeping your home slightly cooler when you're around and even cooler when you're asleep or away can lead to significant energy savings. You can adjust the temperature yourself, or you can install a programmable thermostat that does the work for you. Lowering your thermostat by five degrees for eight hours a day will save you a \$180 annually.

2) The Winter Fan

The next time you feel a chill, try switching on a ceiling fan. This might seem counterproductive, but because warm air floats on top of cold air, a ceiling fan will force warm air back down into your living space, shrinking your heating bill and keeping you comfortable.

3) A Finely Tuned Instrument

A furnace is like a finely crafted instrument: it rewards fidelity with efficiency. And like a finely crafted instrument, it needs to be cleaned and tuned regularly. (Most heating technicians advise once a year.) The bulk of your furnace's maintenance is best left to an expert, but keeping a close eye on things never hurt. Here are a few pointers to get you started. Make sure the thermostat and pilot light are working properly and see that the fuel pipe doesn't leak. Also make sure that the ducts are sealed and that the heating exchanger is intact. If you rely on a forced hot air system, make sure the filter is changed monthly.

4) How Hot Is Too Hot?

It takes a lot of energy to heat a little water, but most of that heat is lost before it even reaches the faucet. Wrapping your hot water pipes in pre-molded foam rubber sleeves or fiberglass insulation will reduce loss over distance. Setting your hot water heater to 120° F will ensure that your water stays hot, but not too hot. Finding a temperature "just hot enough" will keep you comfortable and lead to less wasted heat.

5) Buttoning Up Your House

Because heat rises, homes tend to acquire cold air from the basement and lose warm air through the attic. You can't stop this process, but by insulating these areas, and by sealing smaller leaks around doors, windows, vents, pipes, recessed lighting, plumbing, and electrical outlets, you can slow it down significantly, keeping the cold air out and the warm air in.

Remember, these suggestions are just the beginning. If you'd like to learn more, consider attending a Button Up NH: Home Energy Savings Workshop. The free evening workshops are conducted by certified home energy auditors who do an excellent job of introducing homeowners to the basics of energy budgets and the value of do-it-yourself weatherization. If you're interested in learning more, or if you'd like find a workshop nearby, please contact Garry Dow, Button Up NH Coordinator, at (603) 422-6464, ext. 115 or gdow@cleanair-coolplanet.org.

GREENWorks is brought to you each month by the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services. If you would like to see a particular topic addressed or would like to submit a guest column for a future issue, please contact Jim Martin at james.martin@des.nh.gov.